

Soviet Civil Defense

CIA Report Boomerangs on Culver

Sen. John Culver (D-Iowa), who scored a meager 20 per cent on the American Security Council's 1978 national security voting index, has released a Central Intelligence Agency study that disproves the dovish lawmaker's vigorous effort to downplay Soviet civil defense efforts.

In his version of the report which he requested, Culver said in a prepared statement that while civil defense represented "a significant national effort" on the part of the Soviet Union, the program "is by no means sufficiently effective to encourage the Soviets to risk starting a nuclear war."

Culver also said: "While crediting the Soviet Union with a major, ongoing civil defense program, this report demonstrates that those efforts are not sufficient to prevent millions of casualties and massive industrial damage in the event of a nuclear war. In short, Soviet programs are not enough to tip the strategic balance against us."

While Culver's assessment of the report is technically correct, the report, nevertheless, is far more alarming than the frenetic Iowan arms controller suggests. Moreover, the study is all the more disconcerting, since the CIA, under Stansfield Turner, is considered especially attuned to the wishes and whims of the head-in-the-sand defense stance at the White House.

Despite all the dovish statements emanating from the Administration, however, the CIA report makes clear that, under favorable conditions, the Soviet Union could, because of its civil defense program, reduce its casualties in a nuclear exchange to "the low tens of millions." In World War II, the Soviets lost 20 million people.

What is also undeniably clear is that the Soviets are engaged in a massive program, which, in effect, totally undermines a major assumption upon which we have based our arms negotiations with the Russians. That assumption is that each side will abide by the "Mutual Assured Destruction" doctrine; that is, that each side will leave its population centers vulnerable to an atomic attack, so, supposedly, neither side will dare launch a first strike for fear of a lethal, retaliatory blow.

While the United States adheres to this doctrine in a theoretical way, we have also systematically dismantled our air and missile defenses for the precise purpose of assuring the Soviets that we are abiding by the doctrine in a very practical way as well. But though we are making our citizenry increasingly vulnerable to an atomic assault, the Soviets—this CIA study proves—are engaging in a gargantuan effort to shield their population from the effects of an atomic war.

Says the report: "Civil defense activities are directed by a nationwide civil defense organization consisting of over 100,000 full-time personnel located at all levels of the Soviet government and economic structure. . . . A sustained effort has been made to provide blast shelters for the leadership and essential personnel. . . ."

Assuming a U.S. retaliatory blow following a Soviet first strike, the CIA remarks:

- Under worst conditions for the USSR, with only a few hours or less to make final preparations, Soviet casualties would be well over 100 million, but even in this scenario, "a large percentage of the leadership elements would probably survive."

- With just a few days for final preparations, casualties "could be reduced by more than 50 per cent; most of this reduction would be due to evacuation, the remainder to shelters."

- Under the most favorable conditions for the USSR, including a week or more to complete urban evacuation and then to protect the evacuated population, "Soviet civil defenses could reduce casualties to the low tens of millions."

Completely contrary to the thrust of Culver's contention, then, the CIA study—undoubtedly tailored not to incite the White House—is a very disturbing document.